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Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2348 (2017), in which the Council requested me to report to it every six months on the implementation of the commitments made under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.[1] It provides an overview of peace and security developments in the Great Lakes region since the issuance of my previous report (S/2017/825) and covers the period from 15 September 2017 to 28 February 2018. The report also sets out my vision on furthering the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, as requested in Security Council resolution 2389 (2017).

II. Major developments

A. Security situation

2. During the period under review, the security situation in the Great Lakes region was marked by persistent conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the Central African Republic; continued activities by armed groups; and slow progress in the repatriation of disarmed foreign combatants. Continuing tensions around political processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi further contributed to instability in the region.

3. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the security situation remains a cause for serious concern. Non-State armed groups continued to attack civilians and target Congolese security and defence forces and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). As detailed in my report on MONUSCO dated 5 January 2018 (S/2018/16), a number of

[1] In this context, the region includes the 13 signatories of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, namely, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. In addition, the following four intergovernmental organizations act as witnesses/guarantors of the Framework: the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and the United Nations

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Mai-Mai groups opposed to the Government joined forces in coalitions, such as the Mouvement national pour le renouveau and the Coalition nationale du peuple pour la souveraineté du Congo. Of note was the attack by Mai-Mai Yakutumba on Uvira, the second largest city in South Kivu, on 28 September, which was repelled by MONUSCO and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC). On 8 February, the newly appointed FARDC commander for Operation Sukola II in South Kivu, General Philemon Yav, announced that FARDC operations had resulted in the death of 83 Mai-Mai Yakutumba elements and 6 FARDC soldiers, as well as the capture of 120 Mai-Mai elements. He added that almost all localities formerly under the control of the armed group had been recovered by FARDC, including the Ubwari Peninsula and the coastline of Lake Tanganyika from Kalemie to Uvira.

4. On 11 October, a coalition of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda/Forces combattantes abacunguzi (FDLR-FOCA) and Nyatura attacked Bwiza, Rutshuru territory, killing three officers of the Congolese National Police and five civilians. In a separate development, a former leader of FDLR, Colonel Evariste Nizeyimana, voluntarily surrendered to MONUSCO on 17 December. He was transferred to the Congolese authorities on the understanding that the death penalty would not be applied.

5. In another worrisome development, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) stepped up their attacks after a lull in activities. On 9 October, suspected ADF elements attacked a MONUSCO base in Beni territory, North Kivu. Two Tanzanian peacekeepers were killed and 18 injured. On 7 December, the Mission suffered the heaviest loss in recent memory when presumed ADF elements attacked a MONUSCO contingent in Semuliki, North Kivu, killing 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers and wounding 43 others. On 22 December, the Uganda People's Defence Forces stated that they had launched air attacks on ADF camps in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, reportedly killing 100 rebels. On 13 January, FARDC announced the launch of an offensive operation against ADF and other armed groups in the Beni and neighbouring Lubero areas in North Kivu. On 14 January in Entebbe, Uganda, the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, in his capacity as Chair of the East African Community, convened a meeting of the military and intelligence chiefs of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania to review the security situation in the region. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa were also represented. Participants agreed on the need for a coordinated approach to neutralize ADF, including through the operationalization of the Joint Follow-up Mechanism in Kasese, Uganda.

6. Insecurity also continued in the border areas in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In one incident, on 15 September, FARDC soldiers reportedly killed 36 and injured 117 Burundian asylum seekers who had been protesting the detention of Burundian nationals in South Kivu. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo stated that the soldiers had acted in self-defence, as they had been attacked by armed elements within the group. It announced that it had opened an inquiry into the incident. On 13 February, clashes reportedly broke out between the Rwanda Defence Force and FARDC in Virunga National Park, in North Kivu Province. At the request of both countries, the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region launched an investigation into the incident.

7. In a separate development, the Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Léonard She Okitundu, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Burundi, Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, met in Bujumbura on 24 and 25 October to discuss

border security, including the neutralization of negative forces and the stabilization of the Ruzizi plains, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

8. There has been no significant progress in the implementation of the Nairobi Declarations, including the repatriation of elements of the former Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) still in Rwanda and Uganda. In a report published on 4 December, Human Rights Watch alleged that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had recruited at least 200 former M23 militants in neighbouring countries to help suppress public protests by opposition supporters. The Government refuted the allegations. For its part, the political leadership of the former M23 claimed, in a statement dated 4 December, that the Government had covertly recruited deserters and other undisciplined elements expelled from its ranks.

9. Meanwhile, a technical committee set up by the Ugandan authorities discussed the granting of legal status to the former M23 combatants living in Uganda. On 4 January, the committee recommended that a refugee eligibility committee hold hearings on the 263 former M23 combatants still in Bihanga camp. Those deemed eligible would be relocated after undergoing a rehabilitation, reinsertion and reintegration programme.

10. No progress was recorded regarding the repatriation to Rwanda of FDLR ex-combatants and their dependants who remain in Congolese transit camps.

11. There was progress, however, in the relocation of elements of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) accommodated in MONUSCO premises. As of January 2018, 256 SPLM/A-IO elements out of an initial total of 627 had relocated to third countries as a result of joint efforts by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO.

12. In South Sudan, fighting between forces of the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition continued, despite the signing of a new cessation of hostilities agreement by the warring parties that took effect on 24 December. As a consequence, new influxes of South Sudanese refugees were recorded in the Provinces of Haut-Uélé and Ituri in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

13. Continued instability and an upsurge of violence in the Central African Republic continued to affect the region. Increasingly fractured armed actors with loose affiliations to anti-balaka or ex-Séléka factions and driven by competition over resources carried out attacks mostly along ethnic and confessional lines. Clashes between rival militias broke out in Bangui and Ouham-Pendé prefecture in western Central African Republic. As a result, thousands of refugees crossed the border into the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

B. Political developments

14. Delays in electoral processes and disagreements over election results, as well as disputed constitutional amendments, perpetuated tensions and unrest in some countries in the region.

15. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Independent National Electoral Commission published an electoral calendar on 5 November, postponing the presidential, legislative and provincial elections until 23 December 2018. On 24 December, the President, Joseph Kabila, promulgated an amended electoral law and the 2018 Finance Law, which allocated $619 million to the upcoming elections. On 31 January, the Commission announced the completion of voter registration in the Kasai provinces, marking a key electoral milestone. According to estimates by the

Commission, over 46 million potential voters have been registered countrywide, 47 per cent of whom are women.

16. The overall political climate in the country, however, remained characterized by deep divisions among Congolese stakeholders. On 31 December 2017, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the political agreement of 31 December 2016, which had been brokered by the Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Comité laïc de coordination (CLC), supported by the Catholic Church, opposition parties and a number of civil society groups and mainstream opposition stakeholders, including the Félix Tshisekedi-led faction of the Rassemblement des forces politiques et sociales de la République démocratique du Congo acquises au changement, organized a march to call for the full implementation of the agreement and a commitment by the President not to seek a third term in office. National security forces in Kinshasa and other cities violently dispersed the protests of 31 December, as well as a subsequent protest organized by CLC on 21 January. The disproportionate use of force by security services during the two protests resulted in 16 people killed, more than 100 injured and around 100 arrested. A demonstration by CLC on 25 February resulted in 2 people killed, 47 injured and 102 arrested. During a press conference held on 26 January, the President reaffirmed that the electoral process was under way, with oversight from the Independent National Electoral Commission and in line with the electoral calendar published on 5 November. On 31 January, during an interview with international media, the Government Spokesperson and Minister of Communications, Lambert Mende, indicated that the presidential majority would announce the name of its candidate in July, in accordance with the electoral calendar.

17. Regional stakeholders and organizations continued to support efforts to break the political impasse and ensure a peaceful transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Chairperson of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, travelled to Kinshasa on 14 and 15 October 2017 to discuss the political and security situation with Mr. Kabila. In a joint statement issued on 15 October, the two Presidents reaffirmed their commitment to the decisions adopted by SADC at its thirty-seventh summit, held in Pretoria on 19 and 20 August 2017, in which SADC, inter alia, called for the continued implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement. The Executive Secretary of SADC, Stergomena Tax, travelled to Kinshasa from 30 January to 2 February to examine progress and challenges in the preparations for the elections. In a press briefing, she expressed satisfaction at the progress achieved and called for concerted support for the electoral process from the international community.

18. A delegation of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union visited Kinshasa from 22 to 26 October. In a communiqué dated 7 November, the Peace and Security Council, inter alia, welcomed the publication of the electoral calendar and called upon all Congolese actors to exercise restraint, favour dialogue and respect the electoral calendar. It also called for the establishment of a coordination mechanism comprising the countries in the region, the African Union, SADC, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Economic Community of Central African States, the United Nations and the European Union to ensure effective and coherent support for a political solution in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Subsequently, a senior official of the African Union Commission held meetings with Mr. Kabila and other Congolese stakeholders on 11 January in Kinshasa. Speaking at the opening of the thirtieth African Union Summit, on 28 January, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, stated that recent tensions and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had again underscored the importance of fully implementing the 31 December 2016 agreement, with a view to holding elections by December 2018.

19. On 9 December, the President of the Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso, in his dual capacity as Chair of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, hosted a tripartite summit with the leaders of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to review preparations for the electoral process and assess the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement. On 14 February, Mr. Sassou Nguesso and the President of Angola, João Lourenço, visited Kinshasa for a second tripartite summit with Mr. Kabila. In a communiqué issued after the summit, they expressed their commitment to peaceful elections, welcomed the progress achieved in the "consensual process emanating from the 31 December agreement" and called upon all stakeholders "to exercise restraint". They also called for the urgent implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the Nairobi Declarations. They agreed to meet again in April 2018 in Luanda.

20. In Burundi, the political situation remained fragile. On 24 October, the Council of Ministers discussed proposed constitutional amendments, including the replacement of the current two five-year presidential terms with two seven-year terms. The Government has stated its intention to put the amendments to a referendum. Members of the opposition criticized the proposed amendments, noting that a referendum under the current political conditions would not be free or fair. Furthermore, various Burundian stakeholders and partners raised concerns that the proposed revisions could reverse some of the gains that had accrued from the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi.

21. The East African Community convened the fourth session of the inter-Burundi dialogue from 27 November to 8 December in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, facilitated by the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa. Following the session, Burundian opposition groups met in Nairobi on 26 and 27 January. On 19 February, they sent a communiqué to Mr. Mkapa, expressing concern over the proposed constitutional changes and the absence of political space. On 23 February, the East African Community held its nineteenth ordinary summit of Heads of State in Munyonyo, Uganda. The summit expressed appreciation for the efforts of Mr. Mkapa and Mr. Museveni in facilitating and mediating the inter-Burundi dialogue and indicated that the East African Community would continue to lead the process.

22. On 21 October, security forces in the United Republic of Tanzania reportedly arrested senior leaders of the Forces populaires du Burundi, including the leader of the armed group, General Jérémie Ntiranyibagira, and the second in command, Colonel Edouard Nshimirimana. Reports as to whether the two leaders were extradited to Burundi have not been confirmed.

23. With regard to South Sudan, from 18 to 22 December the Intergovernmental Authority on Development organized in Addis Ababa the first phase of the high-level forum on the revitalization of the 2015 peace agreement. On 21 December, the parties signed an Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access. The second phase of the talks commenced on 5 February, dealing with, inter alia, power-sharing and governance issues. The talks were adjourned on 19 February.

24. In Kenya, the political environment deteriorated amid divisions over the rerun of the presidential election of 26 October, following a ruling by the country's Supreme Court in September. The incumbent President, Uhuru Kenyatta, won more than 98 per cent of the vote and was sworn in for a second term on 28 November. The leader of the opposition National Super Alliance, Raila Odinga, refused to recognize Mr. Kenyatta's re-election. On 30 January, the Alliance organized a ceremony to swear in Mr. Odinga as the "People's President". In reaction, the Government of

Kenya issued a statement calling the ceremony an attempt to subvert the legally constituted Government. It announced its decision to conduct an investigation. The Government also temporarily shut down some media houses that had broadcast the ceremony.

25. In Uganda, a parliamentary bill that removes from the country's Constitution the age limit for the President and local leaders was enacted on 27 December. Opposition and some civil society groups criticized the move and filed petitions against the bill in the High Court. On 2 January, the leader of the opposition Forum for Democratic Change, Kizza Besigye, called for a defiance campaign against the Government.

26. On 14 February, Jacob Zuma resigned as President of South Africa. Cyril Ramaphosa of the African National Congress will serve as President of South Africa until 2019, when he is expected to run in the presidential election.

C. Humanitarian situation

27. Ongoing conflicts, political tensions and food insecurity continued to affect millions of people across the Great Lakes region, causing an alarming humanitarian crisis and further undermining regional stability. Close to 11 million people have been forcibly displaced. Yet despite rising needs, funding for humanitarian operations remained inadequate. As of mid-February 2018, two regional refugee response plans totalling $1.891 billion had been launched for South Sudan and Burundi, and the response plan for the Democratic Republic of the Congo was being drafted.

28. The humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo deteriorated drastically in 2017. There are over 4.4 million internally displaced persons, more than double the amount recorded in 2016. This is the largest population of internally displaced persons in any country on the African continent. In addition, the Democratic Republic of the Congo hosted over 537,000 refugees from other African countries, and influxes from Burundi, the Central African Republic and South Sudan continued. Conversely, over 683,000 Congolese lived as refugees in neighbouring countries. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was, for the second consecutive year, the country worst affected by conflict-related displacement in the world. In the light of the dramatic increase in humanitarian needs, the United Nations activated the highest level of emergency preparedness in the Provinces of Kasai, Tanganyika and South Kivu and supported the development of a humanitarian response plan, which requires $1.68 billion to address the urgent needs of 10.5 million people.

29. In South Sudan, the humanitarian crisis reached emergency levels. More than 7 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, including nearly 2 million internally displaced persons. There were over 2.4 million South Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers, more than 1 million of whom are in Uganda, which remained the largest refugee host country in Africa, with more than 1.4 million refugees in total.

30. A sharp increase in humanitarian needs was also reported in the Central African Republic, with over 542,000 people having fled to neighbouring countries. Over 688,000 people were internally displaced, an increase of 70 per cent from early 2017.

31. The humanitarian situation in Burundi remained dire. An estimated 180,000 people were internally displaced, and close to 425,000 were refugees in neighbouring countries. Of the more than 250,000 Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, some 13,000 have returned home on a voluntary basis. On 9 February, the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, John Magufuli, announced that the

country was withdrawing from the comprehensive refugee response framework, citing insecurity and the lack of international funding.

32. The cessation of refugee status for Rwandan refugees in various host countries entered into effect on 31 December 2017. However, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has not invoked the cessation clause, nor has it pronounced on a possible date for the cessation of refugee status or on arrangements for durable solutions, for instance, local integration for those affected. Despite voluntary returns on a large scale, totalling around 18,000 in 2017, the country continues to host an estimated 220,000 Rwandan refugees. The organized voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo has continued into early 2018.

D. Human rights

33. Serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law continued to be reported, especially in countries affected by conflicts and political and electoral crises. Those violations include extrajudicial and arbitrary executions, enforced disappearances, rape and other forms of sexual violence, restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and arbitrary arrests and detentions.

34. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, human rights violations were increasingly reported. In a separate development, on 15 December, the International Criminal Court decided that the former President of the Union des patriotes congolais/Forces patriotiques pour la libération du Congo, Thomas Lubanga, was liable for $10 million in collective reparations to former child soldiers.

35. On 26 October, the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, established by the Human Rights Council, presented its report to the Third Committee of the General Assembly. The report documented serious human rights violations, including the repression and intimidation of civilians and opposition members, committed since the beginning of the crisis in 2015. The report also noted that most violations were committed by State agents, including intelligence services, the police and the army, with support from the youth league of the ruling party, known as Imbonerakure.

36. On 25 October, the International Criminal Court announced its decision to open an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed in Burundi, or by Burundian nationals outside the country, between April 2015 and October 2017. The Court argued that there were reasonable grounds to believe that State agents and groups implementing State policies, together with the Imbonerakure, had launched a widespread and systematic attack against Burundian civilians. On 27 October, Burundi withdrew from the Rome Statute and thus became the first country to leave the International Criminal Court.

37. In South Sudan, all parties to the conflict continued to commit gross human rights violations. The Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, established in March 2016, collected several accounts of incidents during a visit to the country in December 2017.

38. In the Central African Republic, serious violations of human rights continued. In a communiqué dated 11 October, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide expressed concern about the scope of the criminal atrocities committed with impunity by armed groups and condemned the incitement to ethnic and religious hatred instigated by armed groups and accomplice politicians.

III. Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

39. During the reporting period, signatory countries continued to uphold their commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, despite significant challenges, including ongoing activities by negative forces in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region; the slow repatriation of disarmed combatants present in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in neighbouring countries; and ongoing conflicts and political crises in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, all with significant cross-border implications.

A. Commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

40. Further information on the implementation of the national commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is contained in my most recent report on MONUSCO (S/2018/174).

B. Commitments of the region

41. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and SADC, together with other subregional organizations, including the East African Community, continued to collaborate with the African Union and the United Nations to address political and security challenges in the region.

42. On 19 October, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region held its seventh ordinary summit of Heads of State and Government in Brazzaville. With regard to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, member States of the International Conference called for the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement. They also urged relevant stakeholders to accelerate the repatriation to Rwanda of FDLR ex-combatants who remain in Congolese transit camps, and to urgently convene a meeting to review implementation of the commitments of the Nairobi Declarations with regard to M23.

43. In addition, member States of the Conference called for the rapid operationalization of the Joint Follow-up Mechanism, created to coordinate regional efforts to neutralize ADF. They also recommended the strengthening of operations conducted by FARDC against negative forces, with support from the Intervention Brigade of the MONUSCO force. At the summit, the Congo took over as Chair of the Conference from Angola.

44. On 23 February in Kampala, the East African Community held its fourth retreat for Heads of State on infrastructure and health financing and development, which was focused on deepening and widening regional integration through infrastructure and health sector development. Initiatives to boost transport, energy, civil aviation and cross-border health services were identified.

C. Commitments of the international community

45. On 12 October, at a meeting of the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region held in The Hague, Netherlands, participants reviewed the political, security and humanitarian developments in the Great Lakes region, in particular in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi. They reiterated the centrality of

the 31 December 2016 agreement and called for more proactive and concerted action by the members of the Contact Group.

46. Other international partners continued to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, including Norway, which the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region visited on 19 February to meet the State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of International Development and other stakeholders. Norway renewed its yearly financial support to the Special Envoy's trust fund for the implementation of his road map.

47. With a view to enhancing efforts by regional organizations to implement the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, my Special Envoy met with the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Zachary Muburi-Muita, in Bujumbura on 16 November. He also met the new Special Representative of the African Union for the Great Lakes Region and Head of the African Union Liaison Office in Burundi, Basile Ikouébé, in Nairobi on 20 December. Furthermore, my Special Envoy met the Executive Secretary of SADC on 6 February in Gaborone. Discussions included the need for resolute action to neutralize negative forces, repatriate disarmed foreign combatants and their dependants and support dialogue and political processes in the region. During my Special Envoy's meeting with the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the two agreed on joint activities in the areas of women's empowerment, natural resources, displacement and judicial cooperation.

48. On 22 January, my Special Envoy convened a biannual meeting with United Nations Resident Coordinators and Regional Directors, with a view to promoting a shared analysis of political and security developments in the Great Lakes region, reiterating the need to address cross-border issues and ensuring that programmatic interventions are aligned with the political objectives stated in the road map of the Special Envoy.

IV. Implementation of the road map of the Special Envoy

A. Oversight mechanisms of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

49. On 2 October, the Technical Support Committee held its nineteenth meeting in Nairobi to prepare the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. The Committee reviewed the recommendations from its field visit to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in September, especially with regard to the neutralization of negative forces, the repatriation of ex-combatants and new security concerns.

50. On 19 October, following the seventh ordinary summit of Heads of State and Government of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Congo hosted the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, held in Brazzaville. The President of the Congo took over from the President of Angola as Chair of the Mechanism. The meeting was preceded by a gathering of ministers for foreign affairs on 17 October, at which the report and recommendations of the Technical Support Committee were endorsed.

51. With regard to negative forces, the Regional Oversight Mechanism called for the strengthening of the Intervention Brigade of the MONUSCO force. The leaders of the region also called for the repatriation, without conditions, and no later than 20 October 2018, of disarmed FDLR combatants and their dependants still in camps

in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and of ex-M23 members who remain in Rwanda and Uganda. The leaders also recommended the reactivation of the regional follow-up mechanism to expedite the repatriation process.

52. The Regional Oversight Mechanism noted that, despite delays, the 31 December 2016 agreement remained a viable framework for resolving the political crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In this regard, regional leaders stressed the need to implement confidence-building measures, publish a consensual electoral calendar and pass the requisite electoral legislation and an electoral budget.

53. Regional leaders also expressed concern over the increasing displacement of populations in the Great Lakes region over the past year. They encouraged my Special Envoy to hold consultations with relevant stakeholders to further promote durable solutions to displacement.

54. On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, my Special Envoy and the African Union Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region hosted a meeting on 26 and 27 February at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa to review the implementation of the Framework. Experts and representatives of signatory countries, guarantor institutions, international partners and civil society noted the progress made, including through the neutralization and weakening of some negative forces; cooperation on security, economic and judicial matters; and greater ownership of the Framework by the signatory countries. They observed, however, that progress is still modest compared to the expectations raised by the Framework, as evidenced by persisting conflict, political crises, the continued presence of armed groups, illegal cross-border activities and the ongoing displacement crisis. Participants noted, however, that the Framework remains a relevant vehicle to promote dialogue and cooperation and to assist countries and institutions in the region in achieving peace.

55. On 28 February, the Technical Support Committee held its twentieth meeting in Addis Ababa, co-chaired by my Special Envoy and the African Union Special Representative. The Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, a senior official of SADC and my Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of MONUSCO also attended. The Committee, building on the conclusions of the workshop, recognized that continued tensions and mistrust among the core countries in the region were impeding progress. They called for greater political commitment and confidence-building among those countries and for enhanced diplomatic efforts, as a matter of priority. The Committee agreed on its workplan for 2018. Committee members further decided to follow up on key decisions made during the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, held in Brazzaville on 19 October, with a particular focus on the strengthening of the Intervention Brigade of the MONUSCO force and the repatriation of former combatants.

B. Good offices of the Special Envoy

Negative forces

56. My Special Envoy met the President of the Congo during a visit to Brazzaville from 16 to 19 December. They discussed, inter alia, the neutralization of negative forces and the repatriation of foreign disarmed combatants in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As a result, the President addressed identical letters dated 10 January to me and to the Chairperson of the African Union Commission requesting us to take all actions necessary to strengthen the Intervention Brigade of the MONUSCO force, as recommended by regional leaders at the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism. My Special Envoy also

encouraged Mr. Sassou Nguesso to promote talks between the leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda on the implementation of the Nairobi Declarations and the repatriation of former M23 elements still in Rwanda and Uganda. He suggested that Mr. Sassou Nguesso use his good offices as Chair of the Regional Oversight Mechanism and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to help defuse tensions between countries in the region.

57. From 28 January to 1 February, the Office of the Special Envoy dispatched a technical mission to Kinshasa and Goma to develop recommendations, together with MONUSCO, for the follow-up mechanism on the repatriation of disarmed FDLR combatants in transit camps in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and ex-M23 elements in Rwanda and Uganda.

Support to dialogue and political processes in the region

Democratic Republic of the Congo

58. During the period under review, my Special Envoy undertook a number of initiatives to promote a harmonized regional and international approach in support of a consensual electoral process and full implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement.

59. In this regard, on 5 October, my Special Envoy travelled to Pretoria to meet the Minister for International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane. The Minister reaffirmed the readiness of SADC to assist the Democratic Republic of the Congo in efforts to ensure the holding of elections by the end of 2018.

60. My Special Envoy also undertook a series of consultations that led to the holding of a meeting of representatives of the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework on 22 November in Addis Ababa. In preparation for the meeting, my Special Envoy and my Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo held meetings with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smaïl Chergui, on 9 and 10 November in Addis Ababa.

61. In a communiqué issued following the meeting of 22 November, the representatives of the guarantors, inter alia, called upon all stakeholders to create the conditions necessary to ensure the holding of timely, peaceful and credible elections. They urged the Government to provide the necessary and timely financial and logistical resources to allow for implementation of the electoral calendar; ensure the required political space throughout the country, including freedom of peaceful assembly and equitable access to State media; and fully and effectively implement the confidence-building measures as stipulated in the 31 December 2016 agreement. They also decided to visit Kinshasa in January 2018 to engage the Congolese stakeholders.

62. My Special Envoy also met separately with representatives of the European External Action Service and with the special envoy of Belgium, Renier Nijskens, in Brussels on 5 and 6 December. Discussions were centred on the political and security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on Burundi and on the regional situation.

63. In his meeting with the President of the Congo held on 18 December, my Special Envoy raised concerns about the continued political impasse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The President exchanged views with the Special Envoy on the tripartite summit (between Angola, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) held in Brazzaville on 9 December, and informed him of the intention of those countries to reconvene in Kinshasa in early 2018. The Special Envoy committed to coordinate and align the guarantors' initiatives with the efforts of the Presidents of

the Congo and Angola. It was therefore agreed that the planned visit to Kinshasa by the guarantors should be postponed to give precedence to the tripartite summit, which took place on 14 February.

Kenya

64. Together with the Resident Coordinator, my Special Envoy supported the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi and contributed to the joint United Nations task force established to monitor developments related to the electoral process in Kenya and promote dialogue and reconciliation among stakeholders. Furthermore, at my request, the former President of Nigeria and member of the High-level Advisory Board on Mediation, Olusegun Obasanjo, visited Kenya on 17 and 18 January to encourage dialogue between the President of Kenya and the leader of the National Super Alliance coalition, Raila Odinga.

Promotion of women, youth and civil society

65. During the reporting period, the Office of the Special Envoy continued to promote the role of women in peace and political processes in the region. In September, women representatives participated in the field visit of the Technical Support Committee to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Subsequently, regional leaders agreed, at the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, to address the situation of women and children in transit camps for disarmed FDLR elements as a matter of urgency. On 22 February in Nairobi, the Advisory Board of the Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework held its ninth meeting. Senior women leaders, including the former President of the Central African Republic, Catherine Samba-Panza, the former Vice-President of Uganda, Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women and Peace and Security, Bineta Diop, and the former Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Liberata Mulamula, attended the meeting. The Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Isabelle Durant, also contributed via video link. Participants recommended greater support to the women and peace and security agenda in the region and the organization of missions to Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan by the Women's Platform and the Regional Women's Forum of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to promote the role of women in peace and political processes. They encouraged the convening of a meeting of ministers for gender to endorse the regional plan of action for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and to address shrinking space for women in political processes in the region.

66. Thanks to resource mobilization efforts by the Office of the Special Envoy, grants were allocated to grass-roots women's organizations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi. The grants are supporting confidence-building and conflict prevention in the region, including through projects on women's economic empowerment, the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and human rights awareness.

67. The Office of the Special Envoy promoted the participation of youth leaders from the Great Lakes region in the Youth Forum of the Economic and Social Council, held in New York on 30 and 31 January, on the theme "The role of youth in building sustainable and resilient urban and rural communities". On 29 January, the Great Lakes youth delegation met my Envoy on Youth to discuss how to advance the youth development agenda, including ways to promote the implementation of the recommendations of the ministerial meeting on youth held in June 2017 in Livingstone, Zambia, which was supported by the Office of the Special Envoy.

Displacement

68. The Office of the Special Envoy continued to call the attention of regional and international stakeholders to the refugee and displacement situation in the Great Lakes region. On 22 January in Nairobi, my Special Envoy convened a meeting of the United Nations regional team and other partners at the principals level to discuss opportunities to leverage the mandate of the Special Envoy on displacement-related issues. They also discussed plans for a stakeholder meeting to be organized jointly by the Office of the Special Envoy and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to raise awareness on the situation of internally displaced persons and make recommendations on durable solutions for displacement.

Judicial cooperation

69. Following the successful launch of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network in November 2016, the Directors of Public Prosecution of member States of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region convened on 1 and 2 November in Khartoum for the first meeting of the Network. The initiative was supported by the Office of the Special Envoy and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The Network aims to facilitate and improve cooperation among members on judicial matters, including extraditions, joint investigations and mutual legal assistance, training and the exchange of best practices.

Natural resources

70. The Office of the Special Envoy continued to cooperate with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the European Union, the United Nations Environment Programme and other partners to follow up on the expert and stakeholder consultations on natural resources in the region held on 5 and 6 July 2017. Efforts were also focused on preparations for the second meeting of the Judicial Cooperation Network, to be held in Kampala later in 2018, which will deal with the challenges posed by criminal networks with regard to the exploitation of resources. On 28 November in New York, representatives of the Office of the Special Envoy and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region jointly briefed the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the implementation of the Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources of the International Conference.

Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region

71. The Office of the Special Envoy, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Rwanda Convention Bureau finalized a memorandum of understanding outlining the division of responsibilities in preparation for the second Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region, slated for later in 2018 in Rubavu, Rwanda. The conference aims to promote cross-border investment in the extractive industries, agriculture, tourism and infrastructure in the core countries of the Great Lakes region.

Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework

72. Following my Special Envoy's engagement with senior European Union officials on the implementation of the Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework, detailed in my previous report, the European Development Fund approved, on 14 November, a €1.5 million peace and security grant to the Great Lakes cross-border multi-partner trust fund. The funds will support regional projects for women's empowerment, the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration of

ex-combatants and the forums of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (on women, youth, civil society and the private sector). The Peacebuilding Fund finalized the approval of a $2 million cross-border project addressing displacement between Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania under the Regional Strategic Framework. The project was launched on 1 January. In a visit to Brussels on 6 December, my Special Envoy engaged officials of the European Commission to mobilize additional support.

73. On 27 November, my Special Envoy and the Head of the Peacebuilding Support Office briefed the Peacebuilding Commission on the need to support the approach outlined in the Regional Strategic Framework. They also convened a panel discussion with experts and representatives of Member States, the World Bank, other international organizations and civil society to discuss programmatic and funding opportunities to support cross-border priorities in the Great Lakes region.

74. On 23 January, my Special Envoy and the Regional Director for Southern Africa of the World Food Programme, representing the Chair of the Regional United Nations Development Group, co-chaired the second meeting of the Management Board of the Regional Strategic Framework. Participants reviewed progress and challenges faced by the six pillars of the Regional Strategic Framework and agreed to extend its validity to 2020.

75. On 24 January, my Special Envoy convened a meeting in Addis Ababa with the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and representatives of Burundi, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania, as well as the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security and the African Union Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region. Participants discussed key regional issues and how to increase awareness of and support for the Regional Strategic Framework. They also discussed ways to revitalize the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries.

V. Implementation of paragraph 24 of Security Council resolution 2389 (2017)

76. The Security Council, in its resolution 2389 (2017), invited me to engage in high-level dialogue, in collaboration with the African Union, the signatory States and the guarantor institutions of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, as well as key regional and international partners, to assess progress, challenges and shortcomings in the implementation of the Framework and to present my vision, supported by concrete recommendations. In this regard, at the African Union Summit held on 28 and 29 January in Addis Ababa, I engaged with the leaders of signatory countries on the situation in the region. Furthermore, my Special Envoy conducted consultations with key stakeholders, including at the workshop held on 26 and 27 February on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and at the twentieth meeting of the Technical Support Committee, held on 28 February, as reported in paragraphs 54 and 55 above.

77. On the basis of the consultations, immediate priorities and guiding principles are described below, which should inform the vision of the United Nations for the region in the coming years.

Immediate priorities

78. Achieving peace in countries experiencing political crises and armed conflict should remain the first priority, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Ensuring a peaceful electoral

process and transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is paramount, as the country remains at the heart of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. Furthermore, we must ensure an end to the fighting and an inclusive and lasting political settlement in South Sudan, given the scale of the atrocities being committed, the suffering of the population and the implications for the region.

79. Second, more must be done to neutralize non-State armed groups in the region. In addition to increasing the effectiveness of ongoing military operations by FARDC, supported by the MONUSCO Intervention Brigade, we will need to strengthen our non-military initiatives. We must consider concrete measures to improve disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration and to prevent recruitment of the population, especially youth, by non-State armed groups. We must also look at ways to curb illegal financial flows to armed groups while maximizing the positive potential of the exploitation of natural resources in the region.

80. Third, we need to urgently address the humanitarian crisis resulting from forced displacement in the region, which has reached unprecedented levels over the past year. This will require an increase in humanitarian funding; greater solidarity and cooperation between countries in the region, in pursuit of durable solutions for forced displacement; and enhanced collaboration with regional and international partners to support such solutions.

81. Fourth, promoting and protecting human rights and fighting impunity in the Great Lakes region is critical to achieve the objectives of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. In close collaboration with the African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the United Nations will work with the countries in the region to ensure effective action to support the protection of human rights and basic freedoms enshrined in national constitutions and international instruments.

Guiding principles

82. To support the implementation of these priorities, the United Nations will be guided by the principles set out below on the basis of lessons learned from its experience in the Great Lakes region and elsewhere.

83. First, ownership. I welcome efforts, led by my Special Envoy, to strengthen the governance structures of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. They have led to growing ownership by signatory Governments, as demonstrated by the previous two summits of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, hosted by Angola and the Congo, and the next summit, to be hosted by Uganda. We must continue to promote ownership of the Framework by the signatory States.

84. Second, partnership. We need to strengthen cohesion, promote the complementarity of efforts and ensure a common approach among the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the international community to prevent conflicts and deliver peace and security in the region. In this regard, we must, among other things, deepen the partnership between the United Nations and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, bearing in mind the complementarity of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region of the International Conference.

VI. Observations and recommendations

85. In my previous report, I highlighted a number of challenges relating to peace and security in the region, including stalled political processes, ongoing activities by armed groups, human rights violations and a worsening humanitarian crisis. The present report shows that these challenges continue to affect the stability of the region and the lives of millions of people. Renewed efforts at the national, regional and international levels are required to achieve sustainable peace in the Great Lakes region and to prevent further crises. I call upon the signatory countries to renew their commitment to the full implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, with enhanced support from the guarantors.

86. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite progress on the electoral front, the political, security and humanitarian situation is of great concern. We must spare no effort to avert an escalation of violence in the country. I call upon all stakeholders to fully implement the 31 December 2016 agreement, including through the faithful implementation of the confidence-building measures. I urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to lift the ban on demonstrations and ensure the release of all political prisoners.

87. The United Nations will continue to collaborate with the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, SADC, the European Union and other partners to foster a coordinated regional and international approach to peaceful, timely and credible elections in the country. I encourage the leaders of the region, whose engagement is critical to prevent an escalation of tensions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to remain fully engaged.

88. Uncertainty surrounding the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is compounded by the persistent activities of local and foreign armed groups in its territory. We must once and for all eliminate the threat posed by these "negative forces", through military operations carried out by FARDC, supported by the Intervention Brigade of the MONUSCO force, on the one hand, and by weakening their political ties and economic lifelines on the other. I take note of the decision taken at the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, which called for the strengthening of the Intervention Brigade. The United Nations will continue its efforts, in collaboration with the troop-contributing countries, to increase the effectiveness of MONUSCO and its Intervention Brigade.

89. I welcome the renewed commitment by the leaders of the region to support the repatriation of disarmed foreign combatants and their dependants in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and neighbouring countries. I encourage the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to work closely with the leaders to operationalize the follow-up mechanism on the repatriation of disarmed foreign combatants.

90. I remain concerned by the lack of progress in the inter-Burundian dialogue led by the East African Community, despite the efforts of the facilitator, the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa. The United Nations will continue to support the East African Community and promote an inclusive dialogue. I urge the Government of Burundi to engage in dialogue with all stakeholders and to preserve the legacy of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. Peace in Burundi will also require addressing the human rights situation. I call upon all Burundian stakeholders to cooperate with efforts to ensure respect for human rights.

91. There will not be sustainable peace and stability in the Great Lakes region unless we implement durable solutions for the more than 11 million forcibly displaced

persons in the region. Considering the significant deterioration of the humanitarian situation, my Special Envoy plans to host a stakeholder meeting to highlight the urgency of addressing what humanitarian organizations have termed a "forgotten crisis" and to recommend how to advance durable solutions for the affected populations. I call upon the donor community to step up its support for our efforts in pursuit of durable solutions to displacement.

92. I am pleased that women are increasingly engaged in efforts to advance peace and security in the region. Their participation in political and dialogue processes must be further promoted. The leadership of the Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and that of the Regional Women's Forum of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in developing and implementing the regional plan of action for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) is important in this regard.

93. The Great Lakes region will not achieve its full potential without consistent respect for fundamental rights and freedoms and the eradication of impunity for serious crimes. To that effect, the Judicial Cooperation Network should be supported to become an effective mechanism to address priority cases, including those involving alleged perpetrators harboured in signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

94. Natural resources must be an asset for peace and development in the Great Lakes region, not a fuel for conflict. The Office of my Special Envoy will continue to collaborate with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other partners in support of the implementation of the recommendations of the expert and stakeholder meeting on natural resources held in Nairobi on 5 and 6 July 2017.

95. Recognizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to address the root causes of conflict in the region, my Special Envoy and the Chair of the Regional United Nations Development Group Team will continue to rally support for the implementation of the Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework.

96. I thank my Special Envoy and his Office and reiterate my appreciation to my former Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of MONUSCO, Maman Sidikou. I am grateful to the leadership of the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and SADC for their efforts to promote peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. I call upon the Security Council and the wider international community to intensify their efforts to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and other regional instruments intended to advance peace and stability in the Great Lakes region.